

BOOK REVIEWS

Review 1

Title: New Right (Nieuw Rechts, Nouvelle Droit). By Ico Maly (2018). 332 p. Berchem: Uitgeverij EPO. ISBN 978-94-6267-124-9

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In his Dutch written book ‘Nieuw Rechts’ (New Right), Ico Maly aims to explain the recent shift to the right in Western democracies. The rise of populism in combination with the evolving digital landscape offers a great base to explore the current political situation in historical context. Maly illustrates the complexity of Western democracies and populism in great clarity, which makes this book a must-read for students, scholars, teachers, and more importantly any voter who struggles to grasp how digitalization and populism change our democracies. In this book it becomes evident that Maly has a great talent in communicating complex material by linking historical and current examples to theory and connecting interdisciplinary approaches. The overall theme of the book is populism, which Maly defines as speaking in the name of the people. Although he explicitly states that populism does not equal right-wing ideology, his examples are mainly focussed on right-wing politicians and, as the name of the book suggests, this volume explores the new right. Additionally, he explains current populism as a post-war form of centuries-old political, cultural, and ideological battling against enlightenment.

The book is divided into four major parts, starting with the change from hand-made populism to algorithmic populism. This part broadly illustrates how current populism is exercised with a focus on the digital media landscape. Social network sites use algorithms to deliver personalized feeds to each individual user. These feeds are based on one’s previous behavior, which is monitored in various ways. Due to this personalization, a new term has come to light: echo chambers, which means that people receive information through such a specific filter that it usually suits the person’s existing views and opinions. These mechanisms have caused new forms of campaigning. Cambridge Analytica, the company behind Donald Trump’s campaign among many others, gathers data from users to create personality profiles. These personality profiles are analyzed by algorithms in order to get the right message to the right person. Maly argues that our current information system is a psychological warfare in which the users play an important role.

A concrete example of how such data can be applied in political campaigning shows how Trump used a strategy different from conventional political campaigning. Instead of winning votes in the center, his campaign focused on establishing a strong following in the right-wing area, which naturally expanded the more engaged Trump’s following

became. Additionally, instead of diverting votes away from the left/center, Trump's campaign demotivated them to vote at all by portraying Clinton negatively. This was achieved by targeting personalized versions of the same message to individuals with specific personality profiles.

The second part of the book focuses on Trump's discourse and anti-enlightenment in today's society. According to Maly, Trump's discourse can be defined as neoliberal nationalistic populism. This means that there is a strong feeling of 'us' and 'them', which is a common phenomenon in political psychology studies. Kenneth Burke identifies four tropes that are necessary to create a unification of 'the people'. To begin with, there needs to be a sense of inborn dignity followed by a projection device. This projection device needs to trigger the idea of a 'common enemy'. Third, there has to be a symbolic rebirth and finally, there needs to be commercial use. All these steps aim to unify the 'us' group and make them stand stronger against and less empathetic towards the 'them' group.

Once again, Maly manages to illustrate our current political landscape perfectly by explaining how globalization is causing overheating. He uses this term describe how our current situation of acceleration comes from political and economic changes in the last decades. The neoliberal globalization and digitalization cause the world to overheat, we are working harder and more for less money. Our climate is changing for the worse and we are constantly overwhelmed by information overload. The cause of this situation can be drawn back to commercialization and the need for quantity over quality, whether this is about products, our work environments, or our social constructs.

The third part focuses on the alt-right and a world of nations. He first points out how complex the alt-right movement is and how many sub-groups make up the movement. From white supremacists to men's rights activists and other groups that come from a conservative-revolutionary network that keeps expanding and changing. Another ingredient is Internet culture, which shows the importance of the digital landscape in politics once again. From forums such as 4Chan and 8Chan to memes and hashtags: the alt-right is specialized in trolling which is shown in its community online which can be defined as radical and anti-democratic. Although the right has always been a diverse group, since the Trump campaign the definition of alt-right has shifted from a very specific American phenomenon to a worldwide movement on the right spectrum. The fact that alt-right is expanding and changing is partly due to metapolitics and networking on a transnational scale.

The last part discusses the new right in an international context. Maly states that nowadays the new right is a polycentric transnational ideological phenomenon that is deeply rooted in a global neoliberal economic and digital structure. Because of this, he claims, democracy is in a state of crisis. For example: the same people from Cambridge Analytica who worked on Trump's campaign also worked on several campaign projects for Nigel Farage during Brexit. Once again, digitalization plays a big role in networking and communicating. YouTube channels, forums, and Twitter accounts are easily accessible and offer a quick way to join a movement such as the alt-right.

Furthermore, Maly discusses speech and style by comparing Donald Trump's intertextual connections to the style of Theo Francken (Belgian politician). Although European politics do not appear as extreme as Trump's expressions, a closer look confirms that the style of populism is rather similar. The fact that it does not appear

similar is due to our media landscapes and international trade relations that need to be maintained. Finally, the metapolitics is explained in historical context. This means that the alt-right movement solidified when the internet became commonly used and therefore the alt-right is integrated within all major networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. This is crucial for the growth of the movement because mainstream media refuses to cover or endorse alt-right content.

'Nieuw Rechts' is undoubtedly a must-read for everyone who lives in Western society. Not only does it illustrate the current mechanisms of the political environment we live in, but it also points out how digitalization has changed politics to a great extent. The combination of sociological, political, economic, and historical context contributes to its extraordinary ability to bring together such complex relations and interdisciplinary theory. This book would be an informative and educational read and an eye-opener, especially for readers with little background knowledge on politics and digital media.

Although the overall quality is very high, the book could be improved by deleting some repetitions. The introduction and the first part in particular contain quite a lot of repeated sentences, sometimes nearly identical. While contributing to the text's clarity, this might decrease the reader's engagement since the information was mentioned shortly before the repetition. The writing style is smooth yet somewhat simple. While the quality of the content is outstanding, the integration of a richer writing style the book could potentially be even more engaging.

This book draws attention to how society treats personal data and how it can influence actual outcomes, which presents a worthy attempt to start the discussion of online data regulations in relation to privacy. This also shows that the rate in which technology and digital environments are changing is hard to keep up with even for professionals. More books like Ico Maly's need to appear in order to educate the public on important matters that affect and might even threaten our entire definition of democracy. The historical context also contributes to the quality of the book since it shows how populism can only be defined by looking at the time it exists in. It explains why the current definition is possibly the most complex one due to digitalization and how it does not necessarily belong to the extreme right. The goal of the book, which is to explain the sudden shift to the right in Western democracies, has definitely been fulfilled.